



News Release

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Whooping cough epidemic slows, but the disease will stick around

OLYMPIA — The number of whooping cough cases reported in Washington is easing, with some areas of the state returning to levels more typical before the epidemic. Yet state health officials caution that whooping cough is still active. Those who are at highest risk of serious illness – especially babies – remain vulnerable. Vaccination is the best way to protect them.

“We’re watching whooping cough activity closely,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky.

“We’re encouraged to see the pace of new cases in our state slowing, but we are not completely out of the woods. Whooping cough is still active and babies are still at risk.”

With more than 4,500 reported whooping cough cases so far this year, 2012 already has the highest number of cases in more than 70 years. The number of new cases varies from community to community. Some areas of the state are still dealing with high numbers while others are returning to levels closer to what they experienced before the epidemic. As overall case counts slow, it’s important to remember that whooping cough will always circulate at some level in our communities.

The epidemic has increased people’s awareness of how serious whooping cough is, and driven more than twice as many adults in Washington to get their Tdap booster this year than last year. Still, with the disease continuing to circulate, more adults should get vaccinated, especially those who will be around babies.

“With family and friends gathering for the holidays, disease can spread easily. It’s important for adults and teens to be current on their whooping cough vaccines to protect babies from this serious illness,” said Selecky. “And of course, remember to wash your hands often, cover your cough, and stay home when you’re sick.”

An infant with whooping cough may have trouble feeding and breathing and may turn bluish from not getting enough oxygen. It can even be fatal. Older babies and kids with whooping cough often have coughing spells so severe it's hard for them to eat, drink, breathe, and sleep.

New babies are vulnerable because they can't get their first whooping cough vaccine until they're two months old, and aren't fully protected until they've had four doses, at 15 to 18 months. When a baby gets whooping cough, it's usually from an adult family member or sibling. Babies need everyone around them to be vaccinated so they aren't exposed.

All adults should get a one-time Tdap booster, and kids should get their whooping cough vaccinations (DTaP) on schedule. It's a five-dose series that starts when they're two months old and is complete before age seven. They need one booster (Tdap) at age 11 or 12.

Washington purchases and provides all recommended vaccines for kids through age 18, available from health care providers across the state. Health care providers may charge an office visit fee and a fee to give the vaccine (an administration fee). People who can't afford the administration fee can ask to have it waived. Over the summer the state also purchased whooping cough vaccine for uninsured and underinsured adults – many local health agencies still have that vaccine available. For help finding a provider or immunization clinic, contact your [local health agency](#) or the [Family Health Hotline](#) at 1-800-322-2588.

More information, including weekly case counts, is available on the Department of Health's [whooping cough website](#).

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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